

Fieldwork Report

Kargil (September 12-21, 2022)

**MA Anthropology Program,
Institute of Kashmir Studies**

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Fieldwork Report submitted by

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MA Anthropology program

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Brief Overview

- Name of Sites:
 - Battalik: Darchik and Garkone (Brokpa Tribal Villages)
 - Villages in Sankoo Valley (Rural landscape in Kargil)
 - Hunderman (Museum Village at LOC)
 - Munshi Aziz Bhat Museum
 - Karchay Khar (Maitreya Buddhist Statues)
 - Other Sites
 - Muslim Religious Sites (Matam Sarai, Imambara)
 - Villages across Kargil
 - Marketplaces
 - Schools

- Key informants:
 - Sadiq Hardasi,
 - Arif Ladakhi,
 - Mohammad Baker
 - Liyaqat

- Participant Profile
 - Women in Marketplace
 - Elderly in Kargil Town and Villages
 - Civil Society Members



Visit To Maitreya Buddha Statues



Visit to Darhsik and Garkhone



Arbaeen Procession in Kargil

Fieldtrip to Kargil

On 12th of the September, 2022, we started our journey to Kargil from university of Kashmir. The roads leading towards Kargil pass via mountains. During travelling we came to know various places like Zojila Pass, Drass (second coldest place in the world) etc. At some places, the sides of the road are flat and are elevated at their edges. We also came to know about the Suru river, tribal villages like Darchik and Garkone, Balti bazaar etc.

Field visit of DARCHIK and GARKONE

Suggested by a local teacher, we started our field visit from government middle school Darchik. We were warmly welcomed by both teachers as well as by students. Gender differences were quite visible there. There was only one female teacher out of total five. Also the school work was divided on the basis of gender for instance we were offered apricots by the same female teacher.

Entry and mapping: In order to get entry in the Darchik village, we requested the teachers to come along with us. We had to walk some distance in order to reach the village as it lacked complete road connectivity. We crossed the bridge that had colorful flags, we saw a few shops selling day to day items. Houses were located on uphill's, usually made of stones. Houses were connected with each other through staircases. We saw some old houses with small doors and there were cattle grazing in the ground floors. Almost every house had a kitchen garden outside. A small stream was flowing through the middle of village. While in Garkone there were many kuccha houses with very small windows. We saw many tourists in Garkone while none in Darchik. At Garkone, we saw both local males and females working together and making cement bricks. Also a school was present in the middle of village Garkone. While it was away from the village in case of Darchik

Sacred spaces: With the help of our key informants we talked to few local males. They provided us lots of information regarding their festivals, their dress, culture. We saw few females wearing interesting jewellery and dresses. There were approximately eighty three households which were mostly Buddhist Brokpas. While talking to them we came to know the origin of term Brokpas (came through goat rearing). They proudly claimed themselves as Aryans. Surprisingly where we talked to these locals was a sacred space. And we came to know about a space named **Changra** which had a sacred tree, where they celebrate festival of Basanda devi. No married female was



allowed to go near the sacred tree. This sacred space was only there in Buddhist Brokpas. While there was another sacred space named as **Duhi**, a top area of the village concerned to both Muslims and Buddhist Brokpas. At Duhi, smoke of juniper or chilgi (a sacred tree) is offered to children and pregnant women at times of sickness and to keep them safe from evil spirits.

Dress: Later a man invited us to visit his home and let a classmate of ours wear a traditional dress comprising of a long gown locally known as ekta and a headgear Known as khokh which was made of flowers locally known as manthota posho. A belt that holds the gown together is known as shili. In Garkone women had a distinct braided hair style. While working with the apricots they asked us for photos and happily posed with us. In case of Darchik females mostly avoided us.



Food: The traditional food called Pappa made of sattu (local flour) served with ghee or apricot oil is consumed in breakfast especially in winters.

Festivals: There were many local festivals which we came to know about via locals. For example there is a festival named as LOSAR which is a new year festival celebrated in January, a harvesting festival named as MANTHANA celebrated in Darchik while a BONONA harvesting festival is celebrated among Buddhist Brokpas. A song is sung in this festival known as BONONA GUOE. Another festival SPITZIES is celebrated which is a new year arrival festival wherein a mother places meat and elephant tusk under the pillow of their children and when a child wakes up he or she first eats the meat which indicates the arrival of festival. Also a seed sowing festival is celebrated in Garkone known as BEA festival wherein seeds are sown by children of twelve years of age or multiples of it.

Marriage: Endogamy is a prominent form of marriage. Exogamy is practiced but very less . Marriage season starts after harvesting festival. Marriage is done through a middle man is known as Halpa. Maternal uncle's role is very important in marriages. Folk songs like Neopa and Gaulo are sung by grooms side at the maternal uncles place as well as their parents house requesting them to give them their daughter. Songs have meanings like a lion has come to your door to hunt your goat. Dowry is given by maternal uncle as well as by her parents.

Local priest: local priest is known as LABTAK . LABTAK is a male who holds a very important place in their society. Labtak role is for lifetime and the place is hereditary. When one labtak dies his elder son takes place of him. He is responsible for singing in special occasions. We visited a labtak, he sung a beautiful song for us and told about his duties towards his society.



Elderly Brokpa Participant singing folk songs

Market Observation

On 21st September 2022, the 7th day of our fieldwork, after the visits to different places of rural Kargil, we got the opportunity to explore the market of Kargil town. Market is such a place where one can get the glimpse of the everyday life of Kargil. From students to shopkeepers everyone can be seen in the market. People belonging to different groups based on age, class, profession can be seen in the market. The culture of Kargil; the style of dressing of people, their foods and eating habits, their interactions with each other is more visible in the market of the town. When walking down the main market in Kargil, the shops of every type are seen. From the small shops of grocery items to big restaurants'. Kargil market is a place that provides livelihood to large number of people. There is market where people usually women from different parts of India mainly Uttarakhand come to sell their products. This part of market has huge rush of locals and non-local visitors. The shops in Kargil market are small compared to those in Kashmir and shopkeepers have tools outside the shops; on the streets where they sit.

We visited the market on Wednesday and a festival was celebrated. The people had prepared a famous cuisine "Thukpa" which they distribute on the streets. We also were offered the food by some shopkeepers who brought it for us. People were seen sitting on the footpaths and enjoying this cuisine. It won't be wrong to say that this festival and this cuisine brought the people together.

Another thing to mention about Kargil market is the famous Balti Bazaar which is famous for its architecture. This market represents the mud and wooden architecture of Ladakh UT. One can find all essential items in the market and is famous for clothing shops.

There is also a narrow lane of shops on one side of the market which is known by locals as Commander Gali or Commander Market. The lane has shops on both sides that have colourful clothes, scarves on display. Not only this there are many items like kids wear, foot wear, cosmetics, jewellery available in the market. The interesting thing about this part of market is that the shops are run by women who belong to different parts of the UT. The women belong to the Shia Community. We talked to many women there who said that they order items from Srinagar, Delhi etc and sell it in profitable prices in the market. Kashmiri Pherans, the famous Ladakhi sweaters are also sold in the market. Many women shopkeepers said that they are also students and also run the shops. Many women assist the owners in the shop and get paid

monthly. One woman who runs the jewellery and clothing shop was also teaching her children in the shop. She told us that they are from the upper areas of Kargil and run the shop for their livelihood. Many women have stalls in the main market selling small items like hats, socks etc. Many Buddhist women were seen selling the silver jewellery with precious stones in the main market. The Kargil market shows the women empowerment in Kargil and how the women want to be financially independent there. Women owning and running shops in Kargil is socially acceptable which may be different in case of many parts of India.

The women said that they enjoy working in the market and feel pride in assisting the family financially.

Another interesting thing to note in Kargil market is that people especially the students sit in groups on the streets and footpaths and enjoy eating street foods, chips, ice-cream together. The Kargil market not only provides the livelihood to locals of Kargil but also many non-locals like Kashmiris can be found earning their livelihood in the market. One restaurant was serving Kashmiri Wazwaan to the customers, another famous restaurant in the market is named The Kashmir Cafe.



The Kargil market located in the heart of Kargil town is the most busy place in the district and has also historical significance, the market has been the centre of trading and an important point of silk trade route where travellers and traders would stop to rest, buy and sell. The Kargil Market even today represents the Kargil and its people and exploring it proves helpful in understanding the culture, society and economy of Kargil.

A visit to Hundermaan village:

Hundermaan is a village, about 10kms away from Kargil district of Ladakh. Hundermaan is a tourist village located high at the mountains and is marked as LOC point. The roads leading towards Hundermaan are very dangerous with deep slopes from one side and high peaks at other side. The slopes deepens more and more, when a person leads towards the village gradually. It is very hard to see downwards from the top via the vehicle windows. But it looks beautiful also when a person spots the poplar and willow trees at the deep slope among the bare rocky mountains. These trees and flowing water in the deep down slopes referred to as oasis as Kargil is entirely an area of desert. Before reaching at the actual village, there is a point at some height from the road from where a person can spot the buildings of other side of LOC. On reaching at this point, where we met a person who was carrying a camera. He was providing visitors the camera for spotting the buildings of other side prominently. He was charging Rs.50 per person for spotting the other side of LOC. We also shot some photos there.



After that we started leading towards the village and on reaching at a point where there is a checkpoint above which the army personals does not allow us. We made several attempts to lead towards the actual village but all in vain, then we return disappointed. After returning, we met a person namely Mohd. Baker who is a local of Hundermaan village, gave us the details of the village. He told us that there were 35 households in this village. Now there are only 25 households in this village. Ten households migrated towards the main Kargil town or other places as they were employed at different places. There are about 10-12 persons in every household. The entire population of the village is Shia Muslim.

Mohd Baker, a middle aged person with little white beard narrates the story of division which resulted from the 1971 war. He narrates the story about his maternal uncle who is residing on the other side of LOC as the village Hundermaan was divided into parts during the 1971 war. He also acknowledges us about the pain created by division as his uncle is only 100-300mts away from him. But he cannot meet him. If he wishes to meet him, then he has to take a long journey

of thousands of kms to meet him as they are not allowed to cross LOC via which he can meet his maternal uncle everyday.

Mohd. Baker is a person who established a museum at the Hundermaan village. The place where museum is located is a slope with houses made up of wood and stones. These houses are built by placing stones one above the other without cement in between the layers. In his museum, he collected war materials, local household things, old notes and coins, notes of different countries like Dinaar etc. On the opposite side of the museum, there is a small masjid. The masjid has matting with floral patterns. There is a little window on which there was three copies of quran. The walls of the masjid are decorated with the floral patterns.

Workshop, Community Sharing and Understandings of Cultural Cues

On the 21st of September, a workshop was conducted. All the students of MA Anthropology Program took part in that workshop along with our teachers.



There were 4 presentations by students covering various thematic aspects of fieldwork, including Marriage Customs and Changes, Religious Practices, Kinship and Tribal Identity, Gender in Everyday Life.

After the presentations, the members of civil society from Kargil, and key informants shared their understandings of various cultural cues. Through this exercise of sharing with the community, the fieldwork data was revised and refined. At the same time, additional details on various social and cultural practices were gained from presentations of the key informants.



End Day Workshop



Participants of End Day Workshop



Felicitation of women key informants and workshop participants